Your Sunrise

By Aisha Mao

The first thing you notice are the stares.
You ask yourself,
“Do they like my hair? My outfit? Or maybe my smile?”
But then you hear the whispers.
“What kind of hair is that? I really don’t like it.”

Confusion comes first, then frustration.
You ask, “Why do I have to be so different?”
Because everyday, they look at your face, your
skin, your name.
As if none of it fits inside what they call normal.

So you change. Not all at once.
Just enough to feel like you fit in.
You soften your voice and hesitate before
speaking.
You learn how to rearrange yourself until
you almost disappear.
Adapting to something that was never meant for you.

You start to forget what confidence used to feel like.
But then, you remember. Not the stares. Not the whispers.
But the first time you looked in the mirror and smiled
without thinking.
The way your eyes lit up, the way your skin caught the sun
like it belonged there.

The light within you always existed.
Perhaps it was small, flickering quietly. But it
was waiting for the day you would stop shrinking.
You stand as you were meant to. You speak without fear.

The sunrise was never outside.
It was always inside you, waiting to be seen.
And now it’s your turn to let it grow,
To stand in a truth that is uniquely yours,
Undefinable.

My Practical Solution: The Identity Narrative Workshop

A byproduct of systemic racial issues is the pressure on Black youth to “shrink” or “rearrange” themselves to fit a narrow definition of “normal.” To address this and build the intensity of our Light, my solution is to launch a creative writing workshop series. By teaching youth to use poetry and storytelling to unmask the harm of “whispers and stares.” we reclaim our narratives. This practical approach moves us from surviving the system to actively redefining it, ensuring our identity is never defined by others, but by ourselves.