

***Rooms I Refuse to Shrink In***

by Lily-May Borges

My grandmother crossed the factory  
for a bathroom built like an afterthought,  
boots striking concrete floors made for men who never had to ask  
where they were allowed to exist.

She was one of four women.

Once, a man put his hands on her shoulders  
to turn her towards work that was never hers to begin with.  
She turned away from the machine and the man, and never returned,  
Grease under her fingernails, anger folded neatly beneath her tongue.

Years later, she would change her religion for marriage  
the way women change their names – quietly.

She learned endurance like a prayer.  
How to feed everyone else first.  
How to survive.

But I was born hungry.  
Hungry for rooms where my voice will not soften itself  
into something easier to swallow.  
Hungry for language sharp enough to split silence open.  
I want courtrooms.

I want to stand in places  
where men have spent centuries  
mistaking loudness for authority  
and answer them without lowering my eyes.

I want to take up space  
the way fire does – completely.

The women before me  
survived by making themselves smaller.

I carry their endurance  
inside me like an inheritance.

But alongside it, something else has been growing.  
An appetite.  
A voice.

One day I will open my mouth without apology,  
and fill every room they told us to cross quietly.

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