YOU KNEW

By Georgina M. Cox

You could feel me getting smaller
every time you raised your voice.
Then you'd ask me why I whispered
as if whispering were my choice.

You would hurt me, then hold me
while my body came apart.
And I called that contradiction
the complexity of your heart.

I made poetry from warning signs.
Made tenderness from dread.
You said, "You know I'd never hurt you,"
with my blood inside your head.

You weren't frightened I would hate you.
You weren't frightened I would run.

You were frightened I might realise
what you had always known.

You knew I wouldn't stop loving you.
You knew—that's why you let yourself.
You knew I'd take the ugliest truth
and dress it up as something else.

You knew I'd blame my tender heart
for everything you chose to do.
You never had to ask forgiveness.

You knew I wouldn't stop loving you.

I mistook my own endurance
for a reason I should stay.
Every time I reached my limit,
you just moved it further away.

You would ration out affection
until hunger felt like love,
and one gentle night could somehow
make me doubt the violent ones.

So I carried your excuses
like a mother carries young—
warm against me, fed from my body,
defended by my tongue.

You weren't losing your control.
You were measuring mine.

Seeing how much pain I could swallow
and still call you kind.

You knew I wouldn't stop loving you.
You knew—that's why you let yourself.
You knew I'd take the ugliest truth
and dress it up as something else.

You knew I'd turn against my body
before I ever questioned you.
You never had to hide the weapon.

You knew I wouldn't stop loving you.

Was my love the nicest room
you ever did a cruel thing in?

Did it keep you warm?

I need to know when you knew.

Was it the first time I forgave you
before you even apologised?

Was it when I held you
because hurting me had made you cry?

Was it when I said, “It’s okay,”
while something in me screamed
that it wasn’t?

Or did you know from the beginning?

I washed your hands in my devotion.
I made your guilt a place to sleep.
You planted shame inside my body
then acted shocked when it grew teeth.

I loved you like a dying animal
still licking at the trap.

You called that proof I had forgiven you.

I call it proof
I couldn’t fight back.

You knew I wouldn’t stop loving you!
You knew—and still you carried on!
You knew my love would hold the door
while every decent part escaped you.

You knew I’d beg my mind to change
before admitting you were cruel.
You didn’t think that you might lose me—

you thought I'd die still loving you.

You knew I wouldn't stop loving you.

I just stopped letting that save you.

There is a version of me
who would still come home
if you called.

I don't let her answer anymore.