TAKE UP SPACE

By Vanessa Kisuule

Take up space
Don’t wait for permission or approval
Don’t let ghostly question marks
Haunt the ends of your sentences
You don’t always have to be the one
Laughing at the jokes
You can make them, too
And not just about sex or diets or tampons
You are not the wing tip tick on a quota list
A fleeting footnote on the final page
A decorative nod to ‘equality’ on the stage
Push at the brackets choking your voice
Your potential cannot be pressed
Between thumb and forefinger anymore
Take up space
Wear pink skirts or black Doc Martens
Know that souls can dance unchecked
Beneath the fortress of a burka
As well as baggy t-shirts and ripped jeans
Shave your legs or don’t
Smile from ear to ear or don’t
Liberation has no dress code
Etiquette or secret dialect
Give yourself the space to be fickle
To fumble with your faith, to fail
To fluff up your lines and make things up
Your shabby, slipped stitch mistakes
Make you miraculous
A goddess of spit and sweat
Stumbling in a pit of phoenix ashes
Take up space
Believe the compliments you are given
Give yourself the benefit of the doubt
Don’t doubt the benefits
Of being the brightest shade of you
On the spectrum
You
You with the slouching shoulders prone to shrugs
And the throat full of half formed whispers
You are indispensible
Celebrate the women you share life, love, liquor
Or the occasional tube journey with
Exchange small smiles like a secret handshake
We are walking pillars of defiance
In every exhale of breath
And assured step of foot towards threshold
Run your tongue along the swords
Of the women who fought before us
Wear the legacy like a pair of box fresh trainers
Lean in close
Rest your head on each other’s shoulders
The journey has been long
But now you can
Take up space
In any way you choose
Maybe you will knock patiently at the door
Or flex your knuckles
Before karate kicking it down
It does not matter
As long as you know that you
Don’t belong outside
In the chill of indifference and fear
Don’t wear your body
As if this sacred package of skin
And nerves and blood rush restlessnesses
Were an accident, a graceless misstep of fate or fortune
When you hold yourself with joy and purpose
No misguided man can ever
Make a wounded elegy of your flesh
Step into the room
When asked for your name
Pronounce it with all the music
You can squeeze from its syllables
Don’t shrink yourself
Like a slither of self loathing soap
When you walk down the street
Don’t cower in anticipation of cat calls and stares
It is they who should skulk
And slouch and shrivel in shame
Not you
You go ahead
And take up some more space
Laugh for longer and louder
Than what’s deemed appropriate
Let your cackles rise up into the sky
Like a chorus of homesick angels
When your favourite song comes on
Don’t be fearful of an empty dance floor
Unzip the stillness with your teeth
Let rip the punk rock in your gut
The hunger of your castanet hips
Eat with relish
Chase at every stray crumb with your fork
Lick the icing off each prong
With ironic porn star gusto
The revolution starts small
At your dining table
The newsagents
The Friday night club queue
Your mirror reflection
Take up space
Love beyond the confines of your arm span
Learn wider than the textbooks on your shelves
So as the world oils the hinges of its doors for us
We can take our rightful place
Behind the steering wheel of the future
And finally, rightfully, gloriously
Take up space