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The First and Only Time I Stood in an Execution Chamber

all I heard was stillness and the soft symphony of breath. We were a congregation of lowered heads and sunken shoulders trying to understand what gave this country the right to kill someone in our name. The table was long and blue, its leather upholstery covering a thin layer of foam padding. There were seven discolored brown and blue straps that stretched across the width of the bed, each of them locked and pulled tight. There was a small pillow at the top of the table where the condemned was meant to lay their head, and another set of straps that came down over their shoulders. About a foot below the pillow on either side of the bed was the place where the soon-to-be-executed lay their arms. On each of these arm-length extensions was a leather strap meant to be tightened near the person's elbow, a faded blend of grey and brown, taut leather that had cracked with age. The straps, and their procession of small notches, dangled below the table. At the foot of the table were two shackles, their silver metal glimmering under the florescent lights. I think of those sentenced to die by juries who looked nothing like them. I think of those sentenced to die who left their families behind. I think of those sentenced to die for something they were too young to understand. I think of those sentenced to die who did not do what they have been told they did. I think of all the ways this country failed them before they ended up in this room. I feel the hot rush of blood behind my ears, the shame of being alive in a room built to kill.