

Sestina of What I Know to Be True

That a stanza is a room and I find myself shrinking within it. My back contorted and cracking. That womanhood involves a folding along the center line and a creasing with the moon-edge of a fingernail. That I've never languaged a space large enough to fit into. Never learned to write a sky or full lungs or a body that doesn't feel like the string of a bow pulled taught and aching to rip open the air. Today I write hunched over in the sun, the highest peak of my spine reddening.

As a girl I imagined remuscling my body, drawing circles of red around the soft parts of myself. I keep returning back to this urge to become sharper, mathematical. I try to rip my hands from their business with my hipbones, my fingers draw lines up the cliff-edge of my shins. If I could I'd trade all this body for numbers and letters, a language

I might understand. As I write, my language wrings out excesses. Shrinks into itself. Reddens. As I walk through the city, my body deposes, always turning back. This symmetry. I fill lines with it. Stumble. The quiet air rips

out my breath. I rip out my hair in that language of mourning. My eyes lined to the horizon, redshot. Girlhood, come back, when my body was just a body —

not a weapon or poem. A body. Maybe I'll rip this paper. Go back to the unlanguage of fingers berry-red and tracing lines

in sky. Line my body with red. rip

the language
from my back.