

Heavy Breathing

I.

Standing flat-footed on the mat, I raise
my shoulders by millimeters to my ears, and hear
a pop in each side of my back, the blades contracting.
A space opens up inside my chest, where I fill
deep bowls with breath.

Then, I inhale through my middle,
expel it, feel the weight of my breath leaving.
What replaces it is some kind of newness. It sits
in my core, buoyed to each rib, and I know I must change
my position. By the time I exhale it has been cast away.

Seated, I hinge forward, attempting parallel structure.
My lumbar aligns as I lean into the stretch. The muscles in
my calves become tense, a welcome burn.
I flatten, bend in half, rest my forehead on my shins.

When I pause, I fold into a quiet rhythm.
I imagine the mat beneath me is not there. Suddenly
there is weight in my skin, my belly, my hair,
pulling me to the center of blank space.

II.

I am still, and I breathe, feel a flicker in my muscles.
Something itches in my chest, and for a moment I
am unquiet. What builds in me is a thumping
request to be vertical. I rock onto my heels and stand again.
My blood rushes, reaches a crest inside me and then,

a memory: I am wound around an ex-lover, my arms
thrown onto him, his cheek close enough to my breast
that I'm sure he can hear my breathing—knows of the rapture
when he taps his finger on my shoulder to
the beat of the song in me.

III.

When I twist and feel elastic ribbons of muscles
stretching and winding, those are the verbs that
anchor my feet to the ground with the teeth of language.
One by one as I round out my semi-circle of flesh,
they align: the words my movements make.

When I flatten into Cobra,
I raise my chest and expose my throat,
then straighten syllabically, unwinding. I speak
every shape that I am—wonder if that is still human.

I circle my arms above me, scooping invisible warmth
and bringing it to my skull. I bring my hands palm to palm—
imagine balancing a bowl on my fingertips. Something ripe
and solid and musical forms between my palms,
forcing them apart.
What grows in the space is a calm I cannot quell.