

## Winter Injury

Burn from a worsted rug that will not display  
for a full day, welcome home. All I have coming in this  
world is a joke that hits me later. I was ever the hampered  
child, doting on what could not feel, unwilling to walk  
on stairs that creaked for fear it hurt the house.  
I never knew a thing about crying out, when to come running,  
when to run. How, as with the lowing of  
a simpler species, pain is the body's way of making meaning.  
My old love handled me hard and I thought nothing.

Yesterday I happened across a killed cat on the road.  
Someone had hit it. It was then I wondered: Could that be me?  
Am I that cat, cut down from the world  
for hours now, oblivious, seeing myself only  
as a witness? I went to touch the body but was afraid,  
afraid of my own body and what disease I carry  
in death. I remembered meeting a child at a funeral.  
She could recite all the times an animal  
escaped from a zoo enclosure. I remembered I am no cat,  
hardly wild as to require a wall, but instead a bird dog falling  
in snow, splaying, pulling up, bearing in  
my mouth some little trauma like a pheasant, blood  
in the feathers and me, bred never to break the skin.

Again I resolve to move. A woman lists  
a near room in a floor-through with piano. I have no use  
for any box of hammers, but still I reply, having been raised  
as though in a family of weavers, where it falls  
on the smallest ones to watch for faults. The young  
among us traffic in the ragged, dinner sonatinas  
seldom the rage. My old love handled me hard. I let it happen.  
The songs I like are mostly swears and clapping.

## Screens and Storms

Our garden grew enormous not from care,  
but from neglect. I slept there, covered in bells  
so I would wake if anything tried to harm me.  
Of the two types of windows known, he threw  
himself from neither, over and over. A bird  
clock, he extended his body past the sill  
but never dislodged from the structure, chiming on  
about how he couldn't

die if he tried.

Who left this lab to me? Viewing a cabbage  
by microscope, I proceed with only reverence,  
while for my own body, I feel nothing but pity.  
It's so naive. It follows me here and there  
like a lovesick person, fetching my essentials,  
shoeless on the slate floor in the cold or cramped  
in a truck for a thousand miles, and yet I don't  
even like it. I wouldn't

cry if it died.

NATALIE  
SHAPERO  
From Hard Child