

STEPHANIE FORD

## TROPHY

Our winter is no dress rehearsal. Is storm and stubbled hawkweed,  
the fence laid low, a dead deer blooming in the meadow  
and other missives we can't read. Can't? In this season's cliff-hanger

each of us is hunger's animal: the men in the mine;  
you on the heart-and-lung; the mountain lion crouched and watching  
from a neighbor's snowed-in porch. What's a year between episodes

when the mild eye has gone to gray and winter's deer  
is ours to render? If I were anyone's artful mother  
I would try my hand at conjuring: shears, pliers, ball of twine

to patch the snapped sheet of skin. Instead, I'm too tame  
to scud her skin or cull the clotted blood. Instead, sacrifice  
pinks the drift: stiffened limbs, sag of flesh, the tripwire heart

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unpurposed as a butter churn. Some chickadee shrills in the eaves,  
a plastic clink lights up the machine, a blizzard of time card punch-outs  
adds itself up in the break room, and when we meet the world's cold doe—

tawny bristle, velvet ear, the empty vault her ribs still buttress—  
we don't know how to kneel. The smokestack's white flag  
is the liturgy we're made of, and as the urge to hit is often ours

when the other's body whispers *hit me*, we must have been the predator, too,  
waiting in the wings. Remember the last ones, the blunt-nosed lizards  
who taught us a constant tussling? We'll never know if they meant to love

or kill each other. As always, the lesson gets hazy. You come home  
stitched and briefly tender, as any light, regardless of source,  
cuts the world two ways or more.