



THE (IM)PRECISION OF LANGUAGE  
— SHAINDEL BEERS

How far the ring-necked dove is  
from wringing a dove's neck. The way  
a stand of trees can hide a deer

stand, concealing the hunter who  
will shoot the deer. The deer, who will  
fall in the fall in the fallow field.

Once, someone who was dear to me  
threatened me with a deer rifle. Cleaned  
it random times, out of season when

he was upset. Said, *I don't want to be  
divorced. We can make this work*, while  
working the polishing cloth along the metal

barrel of the gun. My blood barreled through  
my body when I would see his truck in the drive.  
I was never not scared to come home, to fall



asleep, to say the least little thing wrong.  
Language became a tricky game where saying  
nothing meant everything, where saying everything

meant nothing left to fear. I sang my sorrow  
to anyone who recognized the panic  
of birdsong, the desperation of the killdeer

feigning its broken wing. Anything to lure the predator  
from its nest. Its broken wing  
was strength. I shone my brokenness

like a flare gun. Someone might understand the bird  
of my heart always crashing against the cage  
of my ribs, the moth of hidden fear fluttering

to escape from my throat. Once, in my Shakespeare  
class I learned that *brace* meant a pair, a brace  
of kinsmen, of harlots, of greyhounds,

a brace of warlike brothers. In another time  
I stood at the front of the classroom in a chest  
brace because my husband had collapsed

the cartilage between my ribs. I couldn't reach  
the string on the movie screen and had to ask  
for help. I said, *I'm wearing a brace, so I can't*



*stretch.* I thought of the grimace stretching  
across the nurse's face when I said, *I know,*  
*this sounds like domestic violence. It was an accident,*

*just goofing around.* I wrapped the Velcro belt  
around my ribs each morning as he ribbed me  
I should've given up, what was I trying to prove

staying in a submission hold  
until he cracked my ribs? Was I  
stupid? Or just stubborn? I didn't know

he was grooming me for greater violence,  
the rock thrown at me in the car,  
the wedding ring pressed so tight

by his hand holding mine until I bled.  
Which brings us back to the dove,  
the difference between ringing

and wringing and where language leaves us  
when someone controls every word we say,  
when we have no one left to talk to.

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