LOVE LETTERS
to Sons of Bitches

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Four Days Later I Still Can't Bring Myself to Call You

Once you see it on the highway,
there's nothing so natural as a car
on fire. Like redbirds taking flight,
like T-shirts, boxer shorts flapping
on a clothes line, where some fool
girl hung them. You, my love,
should see this combustion, how heat
cracks cast iron.
The front tire melts, front quarter
panel warps, white paint crackles.
Who are we to think we can just drive and drive?
What finally does set a car on fire?
What finally burns a heart?
The windows are rolled up,
interior dark with smoke.

You are home sleeping, as I grind
to five miles per hour to pass.
Let the son of a bitch burn, I whisper,
though I choke, and my eyes
fill with tears. I love you like water
but I wish I had a cigarette
to toss onto the flames. Let it burn,
I say aloud to the old man
up ahead in the Buick, to the young couple
behind—they've got a kid in the back.
Let his eyes burn, I say, like singing along
with the radio, let his children
burn, let his heart seize,
his blood crystallize or vaporize.
Let the whole mess explode,
let all he loves become smoke.
At Margo's Farm

A goat named Gogo had the run of the place, rode a kid on his back, rang the bell on his collar, chewed our jackets, climbed on top of cars, watched me out the side of his head as I crawled in the bushes eating violets, wood sorrel, clover, some seeds like green navel.

The grownups drank coffee, beer, had affairs. The kids hit each other with sticks, pulled down each other's pants. An old woman lived in a back room, her hair a blast of moon. I grazed the hyacinths beneath her window, devoured her tulip petals in spring.

Once while plucking watercress I watched a white-bellied snake struggle against the creek's current. I watched the men cut Gogo's throat, hoist him, bleed him, skin him. A man salted his hide. Roses were becoming rose hips beneath the woman's window.

Gogo's blood pooled in the driveway, the woman's eyes were blue and wet, her skin looked powdery. Now I know her name, Mary Florence. Silent, light as air, almost invisible. That was the first time I saw men kill the thing they love.

My Sniper

has thirty-three guns, he says, over coffee on my screen porch. I kiss his hand, press it against my cheek, point out the white-bellied red squirrel stealing from the bird feeder. I could take care of him for you, says the sniper. His mouth touches my blue willow cup. Before he gets into your house, chews your wires. Have a cookie, I say, I made them with butter and pecans, and let me see your concealed weapon. Thank you, he says. The sniper is studed with scars, and whenever he sleeps in my bed I study his whole body of skin. Each night I ask about a different gash.

His hands have been broken, torn, and stitched. He grabs my hips, my belt loops, pulls me onto his lap. This day smells of autumn olive and now him. A breeze blows in the armholes of my shirt and the sniper reaches underneath, weighs each breast, squeezes until I close my eyes, tilt my head back against his neck. That spidery scar at the base of his thumb is from a cat, he says, cut scratch fever. He hasn't killed a man in years.

Sometimes when he's drunk, I drive my Chevy pick-up along old roads. He aims his rifle with night scope out the window at signs, stumps, buckets, security lights. When he says, possum! I accelerate. His dark eyes shine. We are nearly naked on the bench seat. Snipers are grown-up farm boys. They have perched with shotguns outside chicken houses, asked for seconds at the dinner table, said ma'am to women like me who deliver the mail. When we reach the river, we park under the willows, make love on the cold steel bed of my truck.
Sleep

I want to sleep the sleep of mushrooms
the sleep of potatoes
the weighted sleep that birds fear
the sleep you sleep after we fuck
and you turn away
the orange-tinged dirt-sleep of dusk
the sleep of remembering what’s been forgotten
the sleep of forgetting again
the uncomplaining sleep of decay
spider webs, ants’ nests, film of dust
the sleep of crumbling jawbone
the moon sleep of moss

I inhale deeply, evenly, your stink, I dream
of cocoons, I dream
of your light-hearted little girlfriend
who sings in the laundry
torn to shreds by wild dogs

What We Girls Did for Fun

Our screams rippled the American flags
we wore twisted into halter tops,
held with safety pins. We stopped
to light cigarettes and check our pimples in bicycle mirrors,
to curse and stroke our museled thighs. Our mercury
fillings brought in radio signals from other galaxies
but the only foreign language we knew
was Penis and our tongues were wild with translation.

We lost our minds when free-waving flags twisted
around flagpoles, when murderers murdered us. Pay
attention, our teachers said, and when we all screamed at once
the night sky lit up for an instant.