

LOVE LETTERS  
*to Sons of Bitches*

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

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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 bursts 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, woodsorrel,  
 clover, some seeds like green navels.

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 studded  
 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, *cat 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 muscled 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.