

## *Tender*

my neighbor told me he loved me when  
my keys were stuck in my door,

Jack Daniels dangled from his hands  
like some sort of cheap chandelier,

he smelled of my father's bomber jacket with  
his half cigarette in the pocket and

I asked God that I wouldn't be sold back to  
Heaven for a quick grab at my soul.

Last night I cut open a stranger's smile, said he  
would look prettier beheaded at

the bar, he shattered all sapphire and shame, a wet  
stutter against my ankles as I danced

with my mother's laughter grenades singing  
through me, it was my favorite song when

I ran headless in the street past a cop car, pink jacket  
fluttering, my breath an angel cry

of white noise and the people having a bonfire  
yelled, *look at how fast she is going!*

I talk to the moon and my dead grandmother  
like they are the same prayer and

grief feels like birth to death in slow motion,  
that's why I told the man at the bar how

many I've killed like peace be with you, like  
an amen that sinned on purpose,

because my friend said *sometimes you  
have to say fuck you to all the people,*

because the phone receiver is backed up with  
broken teeth, hoping that violence

will make something tender, something  
worth forgiving, but

memory can't be murdered,  
all there is left is to build it a home.

Dear Venus, you said in order to make life  
the womb needs flames,

and this body is an effigy on fire—I have  
swept last night's rust to make a

scraped-up halo and screamed into my car  
until I became stainless.

Until there was nothing in my hands but love  
and some gore.

Until the swallowed rot glittered and  
I could say it looks like hope.

I learned that,  
*canta y no llores* means sing, don't cry,

and there is someone singing outside my window; I  
am tapping my fingers against my thigh,

something inside rattles stilled, a hum I could  
cherry-pick and keep pressed between lips,

bruised fruit

mercy  
a thing of the past