

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