LULLARY WITH FIREFLIES AND RISING SEAS

And if the woods carry you into their deep and tangled. If the woods claim you

elf or sprite and spirit you from me. Tell me your first fireflies

were enough, the lawn they candled to enchantment. Because the dark

of childhood is mythed and monstered, but my dark

mind glints off every surface sharp enough to slit. Tonight,

ice sheets slide like seals into the sea and in Nice,

parents hurl their children out of the truck's path. Their only

prayer, a heartbeat's worth of *please*. Maybe, like me,

the only god you can conceive is a kind of wakefulness.

Feel the stream of night tugging your ankles? See

the seams of night torn with those brief lights?

Sometimes I ring the fine bones of your wrist

with my forefinger and thumb and wonder at the monstrous love that flung you into this. In every fairy tale, the mother dies

and is replaced by someone wicked. It's true, I want to keep you safe, but I want

to keep you mine. I never meant to fly you like a kite. I never meant to stay

behind. But the mother is a cottage the daughter flutters from, the mother

more cage than bird, and the parting clean as a licked sword. The future, a castle that can't be

childproofed. And the fairy tale, still open on my lap, is not a map.

GROWING UP WILD

Look how tall the pines loom, how deep glacial streams gash fields of lupine. It is dangerous to be a child. The starcut wilds spark with rhythms and nothing rhymes when her griefcry cracks the Precambrian sky, a blue so ancient I almost believe humans will never touch it. But we are worming up there too, parasites grazing the mind of God. There is so little left untouched and god knows we can't stop touching. I hurry my babies along wellmarked trails in wellmapped woods, through a camouflaged dazzle of song. A doe stills us with her sideeye while her fawns fleet into the trees. So many creatures slide from our gaze, little flames of meeting. No matter how much I wish this swordsheen green for us, the Timber! shadows laying down the planks of coming night, no matter how much I want those arctic stars, swarmed thick against a black that seems somehow plush and vacant at once, sometimes I fear there is nowhere safer to keep the wild than outside. Any territory, I'm told, once claimed, must be defended. So we kill even with our desire to live gently. But there is no gentleness between hunger and what feeds it. Oh, it is dangerous to love a child.

TIME CAPSULE: THE FALLOW DEER

Reader, they have slaughtered the white deer of my childhood. My father enchanted them into unicorns as they drifted in with the fog

that filled our valleys. They were imports, ornamental. Shipped in by some rich eccentric for his pleasure. Reader, it's true: they outgrew

their pen, outlived their keeper. Up close they were not white, really, more dayold snow, their fur matted with ticks and burrs. Their horns not spiral,

but branched. Reader, they were nothing like unicorns, but I loved to spot them from my father's truck as we drove the sinuous

road to the coast. How they came out like stars in the scrub oak. My father kept a gun in the back seat. He kept a season for killing,

the other three for wonder. I woke once to headlights slashed across my bedroom window, a buck strung

by his hind legs in the pear tree, belly split sternum to pelvis, my father cutting him down into pieces we could swallow.

Those evenings though, my father never fired, only whistled to startle them up from their grazing so I could call them

by their horns: button buck, spike, doe. They called them invasive and shot them from helicopters. Who were they, Reader, to draw

the line of belonging? The white deer were my fireflies, my everyday magic. But who am I? In the crackle of starlight,

above dry leaves soaked silent, the dead buck shone, nothing like a unicorn. Up close it is harder to stomach what we do

with this awe, with these hands.

Huntress

The stag's heart spoke (as it passed through my throat) of desire.

I've held the strangest of strangers.
To swallow, the quickest way to close

that distance. I'm still so hungry for the tribe of shadows that rubs

its fur against my nighttime and there are no bars, but bars

of trees. Yes, the forest speaks with many voices.

All of them say *Lie down*, *die here*. Yes, stomachs split

and organs fall from ordained order. A liver jewels

at me through the murk of dream. All beings fall

through each other, through topsoil, into deep cradles of rain.

I'm afraid I'll never know another body, only the bloom

of impact. And in the dark we're all moonblind, heat-

seeking. I've seen the cavity-colored tracks in antlers,

ticks balloon with blood, and fleas rise like ghosts from drying hides. How deep I've looked with my gleaming knives.

Their eyes are open, but their gaze is closed.

Like them, I've learned to veil my face in breath, white as vapor-

bone. Behind it, my teeth press my tongue until I can taste

my own blood, the tang of steel bars in the rain.

OH ARTEMIS,

I did all the things you wouldn't. My heart beat to be snared. And it was, and it was. Oh capture of glances. Hot stammer of graces

against my neck, my breasts. Oh love, that trap. I am heavy with it. My hips laden with daughters. Settled, domestic. Artemis, my girls are all sinew

and shine. And heathen still. Your dystopian disciples, they crest the ridge of the future, mooncaged and clad in what they have killed.

Flintstrike of foot against forest floor. See how they sharpen, laureled with breath? I whisper such myth into their skin while they sleep

beneath tree limbs. In the shadowlace of leaves, wilds dart beneath their eyelids. Still, they run screaming from spiders,

even as the cellar stocks with canned goods and the age of play swings toward its end. Still, bloodshed remains

something that happens on the moonbleached highway while they dream. On the way to school, I see their eyes

in the rearview mirror, follow a stain to the side of the road, where some poor nocturnal creature spills her guts

in brutish sun. Day after day she decays like an omen of what is to come. Oh Artemis, you were my favorite. I should have run.

ON BEING OUT OF THE WOODS

They don't tell you the woods are like the universe: infinite, and expanding. There is no getting out. You can only weave between the trees. Outrun the cones exploding into growth. The compass spins, dear so-and-so. Branches blacker than night smack the guiding star about, an errant firefly. They don't tell you the woods are like the past: haunted, and evergreen. There is no forgetting. To forgive is to move. Away or toward? Memory, eyes in the dark. Memory, a clearing. Dear so-and-so, as you may have guessed, to be woodbound is to be bound to every risk. May the wolf howl only in the distance, the rustling be but the waking of owls in the gables of dusk. Born to hunt, reared on luck. They don't say the woods will make you prey. May the wings slapping above be but fruit bats, sugarseekers with no lust for blood. It's okay to pray. Defenseless, you fill with reverence: these wedded roots, the leafstrung lute, the wind that strums the same damned seasons, cyclic and scything. To breathe is to feel the dead inside you rising. Dear so-and-so, let me tell you, the woods are like love. The most beautiful place you'll ever be. And terrifying.