Mercy

Elizabeth Smith
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I merge into surging highway wind,
my backseat baby babbles
to the Tim-Tams macaroni yogurt
burger cookies and bananas,
and a crackling alto announces the world this hour:
  buildings burst in a distant port,
  scoundrel stabs doctor in a clinic past the mountains,
  furious inferno feasts on trees, towns just south of here.

I cruise under red, misspelled bitterness on the bridge—*I can't breath.*
*Death*. I think *death*
as I brake past masked faces in even spaces at the bakery.
I dread an eternal six feet apart
like I dread the six feet under.

*Stop*, signals the traffic light.
Through the windshield is my world
this hour, beckoning me to befriend
the brilliant corner daisies, the silent watercolor sky.
Behind, my warm, curly daughter
with a dried-applesauce nose
coos to road roller, restaurant, Ram,
tips her bottle, then chews her toes.

I smell smoke: a harbinger
of the flames that may shatter my tomorrow.
But today,
they showed me mercy.

—Elizabeth Smith