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Mercy

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Mercy

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