

# 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