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Smiles

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SMILES

It was as if a pterodactyl had landed,
cocky
and fabulous amid the earth-bound,

so it's not difficult to understand
why I smiled
when I saw that Rolls Royce

moving slowly on the Black Horse Pike
past the spot
where Crazy Eddie's once was.

Just one week earlier I'd seen a man,
button-downed and wing-tipped,
reading *Sonnets to Orpheus* in paperback

at the mall's Orange Julius stand.
My smile was inward,
I craved some small intimacy,

not with him, but with an equal lover
of the discordant,
another purchaser adrift among the goods.

Sometimes I'd rather be ankle-deep
in mud puddles,
swatting flies with the Holsteins,

I'd rather be related to that punky boy
with purple hair
walking toward the antique shop

than to talk with someone who doesn't know
he lives
in "*Le Siècle de Kafka*," as the French

dubbed it in 1984. The State of New Jersey
that same year,
refused to pay Ai for a poetry reading

because her name needed two more letters,
which produced my crazy smile,
though I wanted to howl too, I wanted to meet

the man who made the rule, kiss him hard
on his bureaucratic lips,
perhaps cook for him a scalding bowl

of alphabet soup. Instead we added two asterisks
and the check came!
Four spaces on a form all filled in

and the State was pleased, which is why
I'm lonely
for the messiness of the erotic, lonely

for that seminal darkness that lurks
at birthday parties, is hidden
among hugs at weddings, out of which

smiles, even if wry or bitter, are born.
In the newspaper today
it says that the man who robbed a jewelry store

in Pleasantville, crippling the owner,
wasn't happy
with his life, was just trying to be happier.

And in Cardiff, just down the road, someone
will die at the traffic circle
because history says so, history says *soon*,

and that's the circle I must take
 in my crushable Toyota
if I wish to stay on the Black Horse Pike,

and I do.

THE WOMAN ON EDGEHILL ROAD

Ah, thinks the man, that woman walking
 Edgehill Road, weeping,
has a story to tell, what luck to find
 a woman like this.

All day he's wanted to tell *his* story,
 but he knows the woman
has the weight of tears on her side, the primacy
 of outward grief;

there'd be long listening before it would be
 his sweet time.
He's in his slow car, slow because he wants
 it slow—

last night's shouting and slammed door
 putting him on cruise,
The woman is gesturing now, speaking out loud.
 Once, no doubt,

the person she so hates was a god.
 It's not funny,
but isn't it always funny, thinks the man,
 to someone?

He would like to pull up close. "This is
 the sadness car,"
he might say, "and this the weeping seat
 and this the seat