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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