

*Maxine Scates***August**

Pedaling past dry grass and blackberry bramble,  
the weedy smell of water  
marsh grass and cotton wood drifts  
up from the slough,  
and I'm sorry to make my turn uphill  
because then I'm always twelve again  
on my first trip out of the city  
lying at the end of the decaying dock,  
the warm silver boards under my body.

I'm winding down a canyon  
in my Uncle Carl's pick-up truck —  
wrecked cars glinting warnings down the cliffside —  
yet we drive farther and farther  
until we reach the old wooden dock  
swaying over the water  
where even now  
my uncle in hip waders casts his line up river,  
my mother and aunt sit in the camp chairs  
murmuring behind me,  
my cousin lies somewhere near me  
and something is changing  
as I go out from myself  
into that first consciousness  
of red cliffs,  
of rock, sun and blue water.

Water we row out into  
as rain threatens late the next afternoon.  
Carl, his father and my cousin,  
all of us fishing,

pulling them in and tossing them to Carl  
 at the other end of the boat  
 where he slips the hook out and knocks the head,  
 sliding each one into a wet canvas bag.  
 We fish into dusk, rain falling  
 as Carl's father nods  
 sleeping under a tarp  
 and all of our deaths still seem far away.

And when I look up through the rain  
 I see the airstream trailer  
 balanced on two wheels on the shoreline,  
 a small silver cloud drifting by the side of the lake,  
 and finally, in that failing light  
 I see my aunt and my mother waving us in —  
 the soup steaming the windows  
 and the trailer rocking with us  
 until we slept,  
 breathing the concert of small places.

Sleep like I slept last night,  
 my legs still moving up and over the ridgeline  
 like the dog's legs move in her sleep,  
 up and over to the lake  
 where I floated on my back in that greenness  
 where these moments joined to answer the question  
 you asked as we climbed back up to the ridge —  
 sun beating on rock and pine,  
 feet lifting in their mantra of dust —  
 though death will never again  
 be that far in the distance,  
 now I'm answering your question.