

*Marine Scates***Poppies**

I wanted the poppies
because it is August the fog lifting
on this bay. I wanted the poppies
because the river flows through the city
where we all gather on hot summer days,
because Saturday morning
the bulldozers ripped the rotting boards
and ripening blackberries, razed
the homeless camps along its banks,
because Saturday afternoon
when the young mother looked up
from her book on the sandy inlet
the river had taken her child,
because Saturday night
another eighteen year old was shot
at the AM/PM Mini Mart
across from Schuback's Violins
though we did not know when we paused
at the signal on Sunday morning
and I admired as always
the way their fragile unstrung bodies
hung in their shining rows waiting to make music.

I wanted the poppies
because outside the city
on the road that follows the river here to the bay
a car had struck a doe down from the hills
on its way to water,
because further on traffic stopped —
mid-day come to a halt
but for the sirens, a passerby holding

up a blue sheet so the medics could care
for those flown from the truck
onto the thistle of the embankment.

I wanted the poppies
sold in their roadside bouquet.
I would have honestly left
the dollar and a half in the cigar box,
but we were going the wrong way.
I only glimpsed their brightness.

When we reached the bay
I lay down to the squawking of gulls,
half-asleep, crossing into a bare room
where I had brought nothing
when the dog barked
and I knew it was not me crossing
but the way the trawler emerged
from fog just now into the sunlight,
something almost seen as the trawler
passes into fog again —
the sunwashed room
where I would have placed the poppies
in my grandmother's blue vase,
the orange petals, the white walls —
the trawler crossing the treetops now
waves breaking against its bow,
seen only once and lost again
each figure battling the waves,
their broken, their drowned bodies
for each of them,
these orange poppies in a blue vase.