

Lois Baker

Kelp

A lull as the tide shifts
and a high-hulled ferry seems to stall
near the Olympics, a child's paper
cutout of a mountain range.

Parallel to the bulkhead
where we've waited, Mother,
there's a mile of kelp, yards wide, brown-yellow,
smelling of rot and iodine.

You say the Sound, warmed
over rock, will surely carry me back,
should my stroke fail, to the ramp
where you'll be waiting.

My foot won't span the hard sand riffles.
Flies hover over the seaweed, its tufted bulbs
like squid. A dead gull's netted
in the whips and blades.

As you promise, Mother, after
the first cold shock, warmer water surges
and lifts me toward shore. A slight
rocking orbit pulls me seaward.

Waves break close to land
and I touch sand retracting like rods
of an anemone. Kelp winds around my legs,
the seawall comes alive

with the orange valves of mussels.

Do you know, Mother, my thighs scraped
by barnacles, my feet almost failing to grip
the ramp, I am tempted outward

till I see you there in your summer
navy straw, eyes shaded, and must believe
you ignorant of the velvety stroke of kelp,
almost as gentle as your hand?

