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Apologies

Paul Bone

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Paul Bone

Apologies

First to the tow-truck driver who
helped me lift the car from its teetering
on the culvert pipe, for turning away
without asking later that evening when
my former student lay beside me finally
becalmed after the accident.
Your discreet kindness reminded me
of Whitman and was a sweet Godly rebuke
as I stroked her black hair
and thought of the family I'd left.

To the cab drivers and train operators
all over Tokyo, airport personnel, too,
but especially the one with a face like
ash who held his umbrella over me,
smoking with ancient patience, unblinking,
as water ran down his face.
He knows before I do the passport is still
on my dresser, as it is every time.
Then the ride back home, wrong directions.
Am I saying *chopsticks* or *bridge*?

And for you, the two angry brothers:
I wish I could have helped after you pulled
me from the fakery of the happy family
gathered around the white pickup. The thing
you showed me twisted in the sheets—brother
or sister it was hard to say—knew me.
Though it could not speak, it has not released
me yet. Still I see the mottled hair, the skin
yellow as the cab driver's nails, a finger
rising to point at the second-hand lamp.

Martyrdom to guilt makes an arrogance.
Senators who come from trailer parks.
We nurse the survivor's passage to comfort
like a final smoke or clove on a bad tooth.
Sometimes the abandonment gets smaller
as it goes away. In the last car
of the Shinjuku Express, a hand wipes mist
from the window or maybe waves goodbye
before the tunnel swallows it. On the platform
the umbrellas go up, covering the faces.