

Flash flood warning

today on the radio—I round the bend, dip down
into the valley when a thunder clap hits
and dark clouds drop a torrent in the same spot
that truck bottomed out in a pothole on a long ago
July dusk in a storm, boxes jarred loose and tossed
from the bed of a pickup. We could have passed
by and gone home, dry and cautious, but decided to stop
and help that young couple recover what was salvageable—
shoes, dishes, a chair, family photographs,
CD's without cases, old purses and tools—
the ruined debris suddenly dislodged and flying
downhill through our legs in raging water.
Clothes soaked and chilling as the sun set on us,
we labored, never speaking or pausing in our work,
their fear and frustration, anger and shame focusing
us to the task till the last soggy box was repacked
and hoisted over the tailgate, and the skinny blond
husband helped his plump dark wife into the cab
without a sign or word of goodbye, punched down
the gas pedal and hydroplaned, then caught and lurched
forward over the hill—cold, hungry, tired, going
only God knows where.

Suddenly I am crying for their loss, the mess
of that night and my life, Wednesdays at the
infirmary when I had my knees drained, fluid
aspirated through needles, the years of periods
every other week no match for a pill, all the tears
my first husband never saw as he cruised the Pacific
with five thousand men, my Humpty Dumpty head
a broken shell with blood flowing over another hill
and onto the street when my speed was too great.
I am haunted by a recurrent fear of drowning
in water, bodily fluids-- no clearing, no air
for the next breath. I recall that ignoble day
I drove too far in a storm down by the old
Thompson steel mill, water pouring in the car
up to my waist as I called for help, and later,
a fireman with waders ushering me through
gray waters, paper charts soaked, old files lost,
equipment in the trunk ruined. Car stalled and towed
as a stunned fish trawled in a net, I rode
in the tow's cab still believing
in higher ground.