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Judas

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RICK BURSKY

Judas

I bought a nine year old pickup truck
for the convenience of Judas,
the one hundred year old tortoise
she gave me when she left.
Two or three times a week,
I took Judas to the ocean.
He rode in a plastic wading pool
filled with water that I secured in the bed.
Awkward and slow on land,
his four hundred pounds curved
through the swollen ocean's clouds graceful
as a ballerina in an old Dutch painting.
The red that blossoms from hands
when you nail a man to water is a map.
I held the sides of his shell, followed like a cape
through schools of silver fish, through
the thermocline's floor, through dark-patches
where whatever sinks sinks faster.
Deep in the ocean it rains, Judas showed me.
Deep in the ocean nurses sleep in salt-crusted caves,
Judas showed me. I held breath
in the balloon of my mouth.
This is where I first thought sacrifice.
I was a shoe box filled with the past,
Judas showed me this, too.
Notice how briefly she was in this narrative.
Ascending, air expands in the lungs.
Ascending, a survival principle.
This, of course, is a theory. Other theories
include providence and literature.
Squeeze a beating heart tight as you can
and you'll fall asleep; yes,
for this there is no explanation.