A.J. Rathbun

The Flood

In a cardinal-colored Mustang
L cups my face in her hands
that feel like wet moss.
It rains and we are swallowed
whole. The last dry day I drop
K at the Topeka fair, near
the Midwestern carnival's
dreary edge and the world's
smallest Ferris Wheel,
which becomes no Ezekiel's
fire while he walks into the crowd.
A crow flock flies, the river
reroutes. I drive L's convertible
into a sunny afternoon
though June concludes with water
rising over earth to submerge
houses, barns, fences.
Stars cover the Flint Hills
with white leaves. No words
from the past can prepare you
for the present's weight.
L's dog, named after
a famous auctioneer, is side-
swiped by a semi. One day
I get stuck, forced by rain
from the road and say
cut wheat and soybean
stalks the rind of the sun.
Manhattan, KS wears the threat
of Tuttle Creek Reservoir drowning
everything in three minutes.

Wet black blocks move West to East,
impossibly tight fields of bees
blanket the horizon, and before
I hit Exit 313 on I-70 cars
fizzle to the road-side. When L
finds out K and I
drove her car through thigh-
deep water on Deep Creek Road
she becomes red-faced and furious.
Half the town becomes sick
sand-bagging amid warm bacteria
to save a handful of apartments.
An agony of sky sinks in
as we sit on the highway stuck
within individual cars
missing the camaraderie
that accompanies catastrophe. Dead
crappie and mold smell
and stay. I light L's cigarette
on the stove top while we
listen to the rain on the roof,
a million tin fists. Birds
disappear. Town drunks light out
for dry coasts weeks before
rain hits and random bursts
of wild electricity snuff
the tied electric. No one
sleeps. I count: drownings,
driving, shot in a drive-by, blood
loss, sickness in all sick
forms, sleep, falling, suicides,
a broken neck when the chair
is kicked, bridge-jumping, air,
earth, fire, water. On my dad's farm,
sheep blur under damp wool. Every
relationship I had begins and ends
wet. L's car is dry by August's end.