

Lynne McMahon

I WATCH MY HUSBAND IN THE ROCHEPORT FLOOD

walk the last dry stretch of road,
wheelbarrowing past the National Guard
stacks of burlap like flattened cartoon men
to be plumped into transitory life again
and passed along hand over hand, eddying
trickles of sandy silicate sent to stanch
what will not be stanchd or dammed.
I lose him briefly amid bandannaed men
who bend and lift in tandem and think
that this might be the heaven of community
the isolato's dreamed of all his life,
called into being by emergency, temporary
and therefore free of politics, religion, indigenous
beliefs, though some can surely hear the river speak
and interpret for the barriered rest.
The working quiet's what I notice best
until the nurses in their gros pirogues
arrive like Cleopatras to such applause
as men can muster in their sodden gloves
and push forward arms for alcohol swabs
and tetanus shots before resuming their defense
on the not-yet-ruined porches in the gathering dusk,
the filthy water above their knees,
the Red Cross moving off downstream.