

# Flood

by Shelley Gault

It starts way up there,  
up above the town  
in the sage-thick mountains,  
and it gathers bits of oak  
and ceanothus as it tumbles  
thick with tiny silt grains  
with big boulders rolling and  
crashing, and pouring down, down, down  
it collects odds and ends from  
the Jurgenson's driveway and the Carlos's  
orchard and from my back yard, shreds  
of gazania and poppy leaves  
all chewed up and a whole layer  
of good garden soil that ends up  
in the narrow tributary and  
makes its way through the Struven's  
collecting a little horse shit there,  
a little hay, and past Briley's  
where some of the crushed sandstone  
from his constantly graded land  
finds company in the brown swirl,  
and it reaches the Tennis Club,  
picking up a few lost balls there,  
a plastic bottle some kid threw in  
last summer and it meets the main channel  
coming down from the Botanic Garden bringing  
a soup of ground up specimen plants and  
redwood chips, turns south through Rocky Nook Park  
and then west for awhile, collecting more castoffs  
of the suburbs—sinks, refrigerators, grass cuttings  
and old window hardware, unpaid bills and beer openers,  
that bike helmet John lost last year, and when it finally  
reaches the freeway and has to turn left again, it's way too  
full, it's reeling, it begins to throw up this stuff all over

down where my daddy sits unconscious in a clean tile-floored room,  
his head tilted forward and a storm of thoughts hidden within;  
life comes in streaming turbulence to his door, the creek leaving  
its offering of everyday objects for him, calling out,  
"Remember this, remember poison oak and tennis balls and  
bike helmets? Remember, here's a magazine with a story  
by someone you know, see, it's all right here,  
look at it, look!"

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