Higher Ground

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After the water pushed
through my parents' house
leaving brownish veins running
along the walls, carpets
too heavy to lift,
furniture dark and bloated,
we found the photographs,
smeared like a child’s
finger painting, faces
still there but floating
in a swirl of colors.
We saved what we could
and replaced the rest—
the warped kitchen cabinets,
coagulated books and records,
wallpaper that curled back
to reveal smooth plaster.

It took forever
to rebuild those
family photo albums, though
we each took turns sorting
the stiff snapshots,
again loosing the moments
we tried to preserve on film.
For a while, I believed
we could cut away the bad parts,
and keep pieces untouched
by the flood, puzzle them
together again like
the foggy remnants of a dream:
my mother tilting me
towards the camera like
a bottle of fine wine,  
my sister draped across
Dad’s shoulders, my brother
locked and bibbed
in a highchair, chocolate
splattered all over
his bald, smiling face.

My father’s still at it,
peeling back plastic pages
that hiss with static, pressing
last year’s Thanksgiving,
Christmas, Fourth of July
into albums thick
as dictionaries. He can’t
keep up with the rolls of film
undeveloped, scattered in drawers
like prescription bottles
waiting to be opened, to be
swallowed into sticky white pages
and stored somewhere
high high above the ground.