The Mask
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Poetry/Provost’s Literary Prize Winner

Today in PSY 350 something moved my memory
(You see, I first met my mother’s father when I was five)
There is an experiment psychiatrists call the “still-face”
(it was her first weekend off from the hospital since the divorce)
A young father was asked to stare blankly at his infant for several minutes
(during their “grownup-time” talk I snuck away to the garden)
“You must make sure your face is void of all emotion”
(my mother had mentioned an old magic shed there)
As predicted, the child started to cry within seconds
(it didn’t take long before my grandparent’s house was out of view)
The mind’s schema is most vulnerable in the first few years of life
(each step further felt slower, more uncertain)
A still face doesn’t fit into the framework
(when the shed came to view, my stomach sunk, my throat tightened)
It is a myth that we remember little from our early childhood
(in the window, a hideous face— wrinkled with wild white hair and hollow eyes)
In fact, we will never be able to forget