

Charles Grosel

**Self-Portrait in a Birthday Collage**

(After Diane Seuss's "Young Hare")

The proliferation of your face  
is shocking to you who avoids his face  
even in the mirror when shaving, the face  
obscured by lather, attention not on the whole face  
but on the constituent parts of the face,  
the pocked nose, the chafed neck, the needles of whiskers, not the face

of a young man any longer, the face  
in the mirror blurred with age and myopia, the face  
of the dead in the collage emerging in your face,  
your mother leaning in, apple cheeks and parentheses, the face  
of your grandfather now that you wear glasses, oval and smooth like  
the face  
of an egg, hairline receding, and the living too, your father's face

thicker, squarer, darker of hair and beard, then there are the faces  
of you and your brothers standing side by side, looking out with one face,  
mistaken for each other though you don't see it, your face  
unique in all the world, but don't call it a sensitive face,  
not that, another judgment you will face  
lifelong, both a goad and a protective face

to the world, but since this is a birthday collage, on the face  
of it you are always and forever happy, showing the face  
of celebration—graduations, holidays, school portraits—face  
forward, good things coming, funerals and grief to face  
another time, all the young brothers and sisters jammed on the face  
of a slide, laughing, you anchored at the base, baby on your lap, your  
face

straining as you keep them from toppling onto the face  
of the planet, the eager, curious face  
of you as a baby prefiguring your daughter's soft toddler face  
knee deep in the Atlantic in her pink floaty or the sharp, bright face  
of your ten-year-old son before you were asked to leave, the face  
of the one who asked a shadow in that son's face,

him beaming in a trio of blue hardhats with you and your father at  
the mine face,  
or at the wheel of a yellow Hummer, a young boy's eager face

shading to worry on a pontoon boat, your arms encircling the children,  
the face  
of your small family changing forever, on the same trip, your face  
bending away from your daughter as you kneel on a dock, her face  
rapt as you unhook the speckled fish that surprised her worm, shielding  
her face

from twitch and blood, a father's instinct then and now in the face  
of—everything, this mosaic of the past converging on a new face,  
a love-lit wedding, a family reborn to a future you now have the  
strength to face

