Uncle Harlequin

by Chad Smith

Oh yes
That's your Uncle Harlequin.
Old photograph, greenish color yellowness
Brown thinning hair, sideburns
Thick bushy 70s mustache
Tired eyes

I was a kid then when I learned
That his real name was George
Surprised that I always thought it was Uncle Harlequin
Someone said something in the next room
About George
I asked
Who's George?

My Aunt's husband liked to dress up like a clown
Not the Bozo type, or the things in the circus
More European, like something from an opera
Don't think harlequin was quite right either
But that's what the family called him

I can imagine
Maybe there was an argument or correction
I'm not a clown
I'm a harlequin
Was the family making fun of him
By calling him that?

Thought there was another photograph
Of him in his costume
At my cousin's fourth birthday party
But that couldn't be right

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He died before my cousin turned two
Seems my childhood memory of another party had
Transformed into the birthday photo

I was told then that there had been an accident
Uncle Harlequin drove his Volkswagen under a school bus
And had been beheaded
What kind of malcontent talks to children about decapitation?
My frightened young mind pictured a clown's head
Rolling down the street

Now I am older
At an age that Uncle Harlequin will never make it to
As we get older
Each member of the family
Unveils new snapshots of their insanity
Was it always like this or is it more apparent
Now that I am not a kid?

Thinking about Uncle Harlequin often these days
No one in the family ever talks about him
A family secret kept a mystery
Wouldn't dream of asking my aunt about him
Sure it would make grandma cry
Seems like there was something more than
Him just losing his head

Can't help but see something curious
In the photo of him, in those tired eyes
I wonder what George knows
What's his side?
Family histories are written by the winners
While the other stories are left alone to die