



POSING AS FAMILY

Warped in a cloudy acrylic frame
the black and white photo hangs
in the upstairs hall. The kids
are in pajamas. Plaids and flannels.
Robe sash knotted at my sister's
waist. Mother's hair is still dark, fresh
from the beauty parlor. Stepfather's eyes
huge behind his thick glasses. None
of my friends' dads had a mustache.

When my high school photo teacher
gave the assignment to shoot a family
portrait, my family was already broken.
Dad lived down the road with his new wife,
a *shiksa* not much older than my sister,
who was away at college. Mom stitched
a patchwork family when her boyfriend
and his children came to live with us.
Unhappy *Brady Bunch* braided together.

Likely I'm getting to the assignment
at the last minute.

I've lined them up in two rows, backs
to the kitchen wall with its red flowered
Marimekko wallpaper, dark kitchen table
wedged in front. More grim than any
American Gothic. A tiered spectacle
of the condemned, awaiting the click
of my camera.

—Elise Chadwick