



Teachers Write

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OHIO TEACHERS WRITE

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PICTURE DAY

The teacher
in two-inch heels
clicks down the single-file line
and hands out thirty-two six inch combs.
Girls tease each other's hair;
Boys erase the parts their mothers painstakingly
achieved
over bowls of soggy Trix.
The teacher steals a glance at her image in the
paper towel dispenser
parchment skin surrounding eyes
a quarter inch of honest grey roots
lipstick eroded by an hour's worth of
teaching
ridiculous schoolbus earrings--a gift from
Dorothy

But she's the teacher
so she turns back to the squirly eleven year olds
and hushes them
Shhh
like air from a tire
and ushers them into their makeshift studio.

She helps the photographer
arrange the children by height
except for that short one
who's diplomatically tucked into the back row
because he's missing the knees in his pants.
She's the teacher,
so she knows who can be trusted
to stand behind the fat girl--
knows he won't make rabbit ears--
and knows who can balance on the top riser
and which girl can't sit ladylike in the front row.

Now she faces the class
pivoting to change her angle of vision

checking that each face will get its glory.
She darts right and left
moving students
like chess pieces
so that no one is hidden.
She straightens a collar
mops a nose
brushes back too long bangs
takes hands out of pockets
and confiscates glaring glasses.

She stands there
a little longer than necessary
and surveys the whole package.
Because she's the teacher
she gets to her place in the center,
always the center.
And it's easy to see she's the teacher
of these children who surround her.
She's the tallest, the straightest,
the one with broad, strong shoulders
framing a navy gabardine blazer.
She tugs her jacket down over her big bottom
slips her bifocals into her pockets
where three nuggets of chalk reside
then smiles that confident smile
of politicians and t.v. evangelists
and admonishes the children
without moving her lips
to smile, too
when they hear the "say cheese" cue.

And even if
the picture is slightly out of focus
all is well
because
she is the teacher.