

Teacher's Names

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For what more-than-mortal sin is the soul squeezed
inside the body of a grub, then forced to enter
a room boiling with twelve-year-olds, and say, "Good
morning, class, I'm Mrs. Butt"? What Malevolence
found the one school in Texas where a penis was a *doan*,
then dumped Mr. Smalldoan in its dusty halls?

My friends and I learned self-control, intoning,
"May I have a hall pass, Mrs. Titsworth, please?"
We learned creativity, finding fresh ways
to pronounce *Ms. Birchett* and *Mr. Fuchs*.
Dr. Harold (Harry) Beaver just made matters worse
by brandishing his pointer like a swagger stick.

Drafted from Home Ec to teach Science, Mrs. Daft
wore mismatched socks, and declared with Papal
certainty, "Jupiter's much bigger than the sun."
What we lost in knowledge, we made up
in empathy – we with our zits, loving cup ears,
and one-leg-shorter-than-the-other, our dyslexia

before it had a name, our inability to catch
a football or to solve for X, our scoliosis and bad
breath, birthmarks, cleft palates, star-crossed eyes.
“Fats,” “Retard,” “Midget,” “Braces” – all of us
pitied the new teacher, Mr. Cripp, clattering to class,
padded crutch-handles in red, lobster hands.

We who plastered our scars with Clearasil
felt our weak hearts shake our sunken chests
with sorrow for the substitute’s quivery hamhock
legs and rat’s-nest hair. No man would ever
squeeze a ring onto her liver-spotted hand.
She’d be Miss Woodcock till she died.