

BRIDGET O'BERNSTEIN

The Camera Man

Just be exactly who you are! And close your mouth tight,
we don't want to see those terrible teeth, he said, squatting
in ugly blue jeans to take your third-grade photo.
And even though Mama had said,
Make sure you smile extra big today!
You look adorable with those front teeth missing—
you'd gotten confused, the command issuing from under
the dark camera cloth seemed disembodied
so, you sealed your mouth
and Mama, crestfallen, taking the photos from your hands,
said, What happened? Where was your smile?
And you told her you weren't sure, that once the camera man told you
to close your mouth, the idea began to occur inside you.
Yes, he had told you to do it, but now
the closing was yours.