

## For T and Her Mother

T was my student almost three years ago.  
She was in my class during my first year of teaching  
and she was never afraid to be brutally honest,  
to call me out on my bullshit, a calling out  
that was well warranted at the time, but not well received  
until far later. When I catch her passing a note calling me  
a bitch, I should not have gotten so offended  
by T's truth telling.

But I make a call to her grandmother that afternoon  
to tell her the news. She promises T  
will have a better day the next day.  
Says 'Don't you worry.'

Towering over her classmates, fifth grade T  
stood tall in more ways than her physicality.

She was confident. Proud. Perfecting  
a balance of intelligence and coolness that  
I always envied in classmates of my own. She was well liked  
and quick witted. T's crush on I.J.  
in fifth grade was not a lonely feeling – nearly every girl  
in her class desired that aspiring basketball playing  
hip hop rapper wannabe, but I always rooted for  
glasses wearing, good grade making T to be the one  
to steal his heart straight back. Or better yet, to realize  
she does not need any man to define her or fall for her  
to be brilliant. To be worthy.  
Already, she is brilliant. She is worthy.

Three years later, I am sitting on chairs  
in a sea of orange, at David L Moss.  
When a woman approaches me after the poetry class I teach,  
she shares that she believes  
I was her daughter's teacher. Shortly after we connect  
the dots and figure out who's who, she first introduces herself as  
L, T's mother. Secondly, she calls herself a career criminal.

Says she's been in and out of the system for forever almost,  
and she may be facing her longest time yet.

At first, it seems like a parent teacher conference postponed  
and put off for many years. Almost feels like too late,  
but I don't stress, don't worry,  
and L makes me feel like we don't have anything but  
time, so we enjoy conversation with one another and I am happy

to meet my student's mother.

I see where she got it from now.

T is tall like her mother, speaks loudly and proudly, exudes confidence like it is a separate stream of blood that runs within her.

She permits nothing but honesty  
to come out of her—she knows the power  
of truth and does not care if it hurts a feeling or two  
along the way because eventually, it will be known  
that it needed to be said,  
and when you need someone to say it,  
you can count on her to say it.

L can speak her future so certainly that  
it is no longer just a future, just a blurry vision up ahead.  
It is now the blueprint, the outline, the making and plan of a reality.  
The smile I feel when L reads her poetry  
exists so much further than just the curve on her face,  
but the blue lines on her paper,  
the spirit that escapes her when her mouth opens,  
and she is sharing bits and pieces of herself  
each week with us, at poetry class, at David L Moss,  
and people don't always know the definition of education  
can mean so much more than grade school and progress reports  
and passing notes and having fifth grade crushes

but now, I have been both T and her mother's teacher.  
If I were giving them a grade, they both win student of the year  
and have a 4.0. Not that we need certificates and labels  
to claim our brilliance, to know that they are worthy.  
They are brilliant. They are worthy.

For T and her mother,  
it has been my pleasure to be your teacher,  
and I hope you know you will always have someone  
that wishes you the best, that believes in your potential.