

Dustin And Diamond Write A Poem Inspired By “Powerful Women”

after “Nicole Wants to Write A Poem With Maureen”

Dustin sips his vanilla latte with sugar free syrup and tells Diamond he listened to Pittbull & Dolly’s “Powerful Women” during his ride to the coffee shop. He doesn’t tell her that for the first time the song moved him to tears. He didn’t understand the emotion on his cheeks until *they* started floating through his mind like clouds— memories of the teachers that impacted his life. All powerful women. Dustin says to Diamond, *Tell me about the powerful women in your life.*

Mrs. Butler, Diamond thinks, who saw right through her in the seventh grade like a woman sees through the still-face of a lake. What breaks in that light beneath? That during a writing assignment, Mrs. Butler asked Diamond to write an essay about a song that moved her, so Diamond chose Christina Aguilera’s “Fighter,” battle-weary, worn through, like a limp rag flagging at the back of the sink, and maybe this is what Mrs. Butler saw in Diamond, what made her spend her Saturday morning picking Diamond up from a home too small to share, to take her to the computer lab, because there was so much Diamond couldn’t afford already, her voice, even—

Mrs. Carpenter was Dustin’s English teacher in the fifth grade. He loved skipping recess and staying after school to help her organize the room or grade papers. One afternoon when he was changing out the classroom’s bulletin board he clocked Mrs. Carpenter showing the other teachers a sheet of paper. Outside her door, he heard Dr. Wallin, *I like that the tiger is the hero.* Dustin realized it was his short story being shared. A tiger escaped a circus transport and helped his friends escape too. He wouldn’t realize for years that he’d spend most of early life trying to escape. He digresses. Mrs. Carpenter was the first to ask, *Have you written anything new lately?* Dustin’s a writer because of Mrs. Carpenter. He wishes he had told her that.

Even the women who needed escape—Mrs. Yeats, who dressed down in patchwork denim and cowgirl boots. Her whole world was mourning; her son lost, her marriage distressed, tattered. Sometimes, behind the stiff honey of her eyes, Diamond wondered if she saw in us the same wounds. *Life sucks*, she used to tell her students, *and then you die*, but Diamond knew that ache, knew it like she knew the weedy thread of song stemming in her lungs, a whistle pitched through the gaping maw of day—no woman had ever felt so honest.

Dustin thinks Diamond would love his high school journalism teacher, Ms. Lloyd. He took class with her every semester until graduation. How he hated the tapping of her heels as she walked around the room and the sight of her pen that often made their papers look like art projects. His sophomore year, Dustin thought he’d want a life in politics. *Secretary of State, keeper of the state seal*, he told Ms. Lloyd who responded, *Dustin, you’d lose the state seal.* Diamond, she wasn’t wrong. After class one day, Dustin asked Ms. Lloyd why she was so hard on him. All these years later, he still remembers her words, *You have a tendency to skate by doing really well without fully applying yourself. You can do even better, Dustin.* She was the first person to drop the hot coal truth in his lap. After graduation, Dustin declared Ms. Lloyd his favorite high school teacher. He told her that a few years later when he found her number in the phonebook.

Bless those women—their love labor. Their hands reaching down to pick up the vestiges of us—how they saw in our scattering potential, laid us flat, jigsawed pieces of vase, bare, bald-faced in the brunt of our breaking, but those women were patient, glued between our seams glittering gold. Those women, radiant as artisans, as caretakers—may each drop inching brilliant from the stitch of us be just bright as their giving.