A student from a course taught several years ago approaches me on a Manhattan street with an essay in hand.

She has an excuse for not turning in the essay on time.

Her excuse is “memory loss from Lupus.”

But, she explains, she did not want to say this out loud in class, and so she is only bringing it up now, years later, in private.

May she still turn in her essay?

“Yes, of course,” I say.

And then I feel the strong impulse to add:

“You can always tell me — but of course you do not have to tell me — about how you are feeling.”

Suddenly, her eyes change.

She suspects something about this statement and her doubt rebounds upon me in such a way that I, too, question its motive and its sincerity.
She says, forcefully: “You are bullshit.”

I reply: “You are bullshit.”

As we part, I have a warm, comforting feeling that, in spite of our mutual suspicions to the contrary, I am a good person.