

Rachel Calnek-Sugin

Ebola in Dallas

I read that story in the newspaper  
about the guy who has Ebola in Dallas  
etcetera I think you've read it  
it made me late for the elevator

it kind of freaked me out  
since I live in new york and that is  
not so many miles from Dallas  
and even if you think it is so many miles  
it's all the same country because Texas  
hasn't seceded yet and even  
if you think they will or should or  
are so culturally rednecked and different  
then first of all fuck you because my  
liberal hippy grandparents live in Houston  
and second of all my liberal hippy grandparents  
live in Houston which is not  
too many miles away from Dallas  
even if you have never left the town  
where you grew up

of course now that there's a man  
with Ebola in Dallas  
I can no longer talk about Ebola  
or think about Ebola the way I would  
the black plague in 12th century Europe

I was born in America and furthermore  
I was born an American and furthermore  
I was born a middle class white girl  
and America is invincible  
to the problems of the third world and furthermore  
I am invincible  
bad things happen to people  
but they do not happen to me  
I am concerned about a boy that I've been kissing  
and revising a script and applying  
to college and yesterday  
I thought that nobody in the whole world  
had ever been colder than I was  
after forgetting a jacket in October  
I took a thirty minute shower  
and the water made a prune out of me  
I had a coke before my mother came home

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out of a metallic red can the color  
of a tube of lipstick or the color of a coke can  
and I did not think about  
how drinking a can of coke affects  
the third world before it affects me  
I did not think about everything  
shriveling and the world ending  
and even though I'm listing it  
I'm still not thinking about it

I am afraid  
I will tell you that

now that there is Ebola in Dallas  
all the American scientists are really getting on it  
I read a story that in Liberia  
they are pushing a no-touching policy  
and read this one story about how this baby  
had Ebola and was coughing  
and they told his mother not to pick him up  
but the mother picked her baby up  
and then the baby and the mother  
and the whole rest of the family died  
and of course she picked up her baby  
how could she not pick up her baby?  
I do not think this will happen to me  
and you do not think it will happen to you  
but what if I told you it's happening in Dallas  
and what if I told you that that baby was your  
baby and you had to pick it up  
and what if I told you that that baby was you  
and that your mother wouldn't pick you up  
to hold you while you died  
and what if I told you  
that the world is going to end all at once  
and what if I told you  
that the world is going to end you first  
and what if I told you it was me  
that I was ending the world  
that I was skimming the newspapers  
and leaving the faucets on  
and that in the midst of wanting no part  
of the world ending  
I had inadvertently pushed the button.

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At Thurgood Marshall

it's warm out  
everyone at goodwill wants to talk about the weather

took the SAT at Thurgood Marshall up in Harlem,  
Academy  
registered late. 6 kids in my room  
didn't bring calculators, our proctor  
asked for a show of hands.  
Damien, one of the 6,  
asked me out when the test was over.  
"what did you get for the one about the farmer in deerfield?"  
is a pick-up line I've never heard before.

walked slowly down the stairs  
with Damien, there were photos of black heroes like  
Rosa Parks, and MLK, and Fredrick Douglass  
and a load of other people whose names I didn't know

he asked me where I went to school  
and the name was soap in my mouth.  
he told me he'd heard of it,  
I'd smiled at him when he said he didn't have a calculator  
must have been why, I didn't want  
to say I went somewhere with smartboards in every classroom  
and an 100% college attendance rate.

I have never been able to say the words  
yes, I have a country house  
either

on Adam C Powell  
a group of men is laughing  
"are you from Texas?" one asks, as I pass by,  
"because I want to ride with you"

I walk faster  
I wonder if I'm being racist for walking faster  
I wonder if I'm being racist for being  
acutely aware of being the only  
white girl around

white girl doesn't know how to walk/talk/do  
in harlem,

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we were all in that room  
for 3.5 hours  
because we all want to go to college  
only I want to go to yale and  
might cry if my mother has to put a  
Colby bumper sticker  
on our minivan

in black place white girl  
notices she is white  
and wishes  
she didn't have skin

for first time  
white girl  
only white girl  
taught to say sorry before she asks a question  
to say no to Damien without the calculator at Thurgood Marshall Academy  
before he even opens his mouth.

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When My Parents Go Out I Eat Breakfast For Dinner and Pee With the Door Open

currently

I am sitting at the counter eating oatmeal with brown sugar and bananas and listening to classical piano music and writing a poem. this is my teenage rebellion.

when I was 4 my father dressed me up as a flying monkey for Halloween and when he tried to spin me around he dislocated my shoulder. when I was eleven I realized I had nothing really to complain about but I still felt like shit which was when I decided I sometimes hated my mother. you are never allowed to say that you are sick of your privilege not when you're 4 or 11 or 17 I'm 17 now I don't know what I thought it would be like I am 17 and everything's so easy that I can use 50% of my brainpower thinking about kissing a boy under a streetlamp and I still sometimes feel like shit.

when I was 14 I tried to kill myself but now I'm not sure why. I do remember the slushy mugginess of the train tracks and the TV screens that said it would be 2 minutes until the train came and I couldn't do it. I sit in a cab with a girl who tells me she tried to kill herself four times in three months. I've been there, I said. you should have seen the way she looked at me then with these round eyes like quarters she would feed into my mouth one after the other and I'd spit out wisdom that she'd want to hear. don't kill yourself, I said. it won't do you any good and your mother will cry.

I don't want to make myself seem wise. I used to cheat on tests. the last time I went to the doctor she told me I'd gained 10 pounds. I'm jealous since the last boy I cared about moved on and the boy I love probably thinks about me 2% as much as I think of him. I have nothing profound to say or I do but

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I don't know how to say it  
which is just as bad.  
I was 4 and I didn't  
know how to say it I was 11 and 14 and now I am  
17 and I still don't know how to say

I don't know why everything is just fine  
but I still feel like shit

I don't know why good things come in threes or  
why pennies are lucky or why you wish on eyelashes I don't know why  
my parents are so happy together or why spring follows winter  
I don't know what God is  
or why you shouldn't kill yourself  
I just know you shouldn't I just  
know you aren't coming back.