

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.