

Maame Blue

Calling

“I’ll see you in two years: that way, Agent Orange won’t get any of my money.”

She chuckles over the phone, understanding and not really getting it. I shouldn’t have said anything. Illinois doesn’t crackle over the phone anymore, between there and London, where I am. Technology an assist. If I close my eyes she could be in the next room. Probably categorized African American, but here she would just be African like me, Ghanaian even, depending on who engaged her. I shift uneasily in the thought of her at home, what’s to come. Was America ever great?

She tells me a story about a boy in her class boasting about his father not voting for Hillary because she would have raised his taxes. My baby sis, reminding me of the 1% that she’s growing with, learning with, laughing with. Our trajectories were always of a different calibre.

“What do you think of him?”

Why am I talking politics with a nine-year-old? I flick a wrist and look at my watch; 10 p.m. to her 4 p.m., the rain outside a London reminder of the hardness of my own city, while I try to pick hers apart. She has that whip smart thing though, like, I know somehow that she knows things. I need her to know things, to be safe and aware at all times. But I’m afraid I’ll scare her, and she’s too young for all of that.

She doesn’t reply, instead I hear a yawn, a yell in the background, her brain tired of our exercise. She starts to tell me about a boy in her class instead.

“He has blonde curly hair and all the girls like him.”

I laugh, unable to hide it. I press her, wondering why he is the object of everyone’s affection. Her description is repeated: blonde hair, blue eyes, what more do you need to know? I suppose she does understand the world; desirability is a recessive gene and watery eyes. And it’s crowd-sourced. I sigh, amused, a little sad but unable to engage with it.

She has to go, things on her packed agenda. I smile and

we say our goodbyes.

“I love you.”

“Love you too.”

We don't speak enough. And I don't think of Illinois like I used to. The starkest memories are from eleven years ago, waking up to bright, white snow, thick on the ground like an icy moat around the house. No movement outside, sitting suburb-side at the window, wondering why unhappiness struck me like a train at age 21. I used the trip, seeing family, as a stop gap after mandatory education. University, but a West African girl, so, it was mandatory.

I pulled myself into distraction entertaining my sister and two brothers, my accent, British, pushing closer to the Queen of England than the working-class London I was born into, whenever I encountered Americans. But there was no mistaking me in Naperville: sometimes Black British, most times just black. In place and out of it, all at the same time.

Yet still, I had space there, a mental freedom to work through my depression, in between learning to drive on the right side and finding small joys in small-town life. The suburbs, that manufactured fence, cradled me while I grappled with crippling loneliness. It was a safety net, somehow. And now, I don't know.

My memories are mutilated by the politics of the present. I play Brexit roulette when I open up the BBC news homepage, and then swiftly skip over to Twitter to hear about the most recent terror in America. What is the name for being in two places at once without being anywhere?

I wonder about the place I jokingly used to call Wisteria Lane: the neighbours who smile at everyone, who ask how you're doing without waiting for an answer. My sister catching the school bus outside the house. My brothers playing Super Mario Kart in the basement.

And the drive to the supermarket, a man in a red hat with a white slogan, surveying my parents suspiciously as they mull over the fruit and vegetables.

I wonder about fear. Maybe I should be afraid. Or maybe I should just call them more.

Maame Blue is a Ghanaian Londoner, writer, and co-host of the *Headscarves and Carry-ons* podcast. She can be found blogging (see: ranting) at maamebluwrites.com and has been published in various places including *AFREADA*, *Memoir Mag*, and *Watermelanin Mag*. She is currently based in Essex, UK.