

security checkpoint..." : "At the airport-

By Claudia Rankine

At the airport-security checkpoint on my way to visit my grandmother, I am asked to drink from my water bottle.

This water bottle?

That's right. Open it and drink from it.

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At the airport-security checkpoint on my way to visit my grandmother, I am asked to take off my shoes.

Take off my shoes?

Yes. Both Please.

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At the airport-security checkpoint on my way to visit my grandmother, I am asked if I have a fever.

A fever? Really?

Yes. Really.

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My grandmother is in a nursing home. It's not bad. It doesn't smell like pee. It doesn't smell like anything. When I go to see her, as I walk through the hall past the common room and the nurses' station, old person after old person puts out his or her hand to me. Steven, one says. Ann, another calls. It's like being in a third-world country, but instead of food or money you are what is wanted, your company. In third-world countries I have felt overwhelmingly American, calcium-rich, privileged, and white. Here, I feel young, lucky, and sad. Sad is one of those words that has given up its life for our country, it's been a martyr for the American dream, it's been neutralized, co-opted by our culture to suggest a tinge of discomfort that lasts the time it takes for this and then for that to happen, the time it takes to change a channel. But sadness is real because once it meant something real. It meant dignified, grave; it meant trustworthy; it meant exceptionally bad, deplorable, shameful; it meant massive, weighty, forming a compact body; it meant falling heavily; and it meant of a color: dark. It meant dark in color, to darken. It meant me. I felt sad.

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