

False Active Shooter

Anna Sysling

January 8, 2024

My sister turned 15 last week
She plays the flute and studies all the time
She bakes cupcakes and tries to make friends
In the smartphone
hormone
hothouse
Called high school

I've been trying to start this poem
for two hours now
The poem about the false active shooter
in her high school today

From the luke warm water
I sit in my bathtub and listen
to the sound of my neighbor upstairs laughing
and the car doors opening and closing outside my apartment

The heat in my building clicks on and off
The world continues humming
As my world hairline fractured
in some riblike place
where I now wince
every time that I breathe

I know she is safe at home now
probably laughing at videos of dancing cats,
on the couch in blue fuzzy socks
with her beloved blue heeler Sabine

But still I could cry

because today there was a false active shooter
at my baby sister's high school
and before officials called it false
she texted to say she was in a classroom alone
doing homework
to avoid the sideways glances and sweaty palms
of lunch in a high school cafeteria.

Her math teacher let her come in to work
but then left to get some food
and that's when it happened.

Alarms went off
and a voice came over the loudspeaker
telling my 15 year old sister
a lockdown was in effect.

I've been trying to start this poem for two hours
Thinking about the polka dot scrunchie on her wrist
as she locked the door of the classroom
hiding behind a desk
in the cropped seafoam cardigan she just got for her birthday.
Alone and waiting for 45 minutes
to find out if she'd make it home from school today

Has she ever kissed someone?
Has she ever smoked anything?
Does she know it gets better as she gets stronger?

Has she ever watched the sun rise?
Has she ever stolen from a store?
Did I tell her "I love you" the last time we talked?

It turned out to be false
A false active shooter,
and even though she is scared
school will resume tomorrow.

The wind whipping outside
shakes the windows
of this warm and dry place.
Full of pillows and food
and my cat kneads into a blanket
before curling up to sleep.

And I've been trying to start this poem
for two hours
about the portal into an alternate storyline
where, this afternoon a tectonic chasm
opened just enough to show
A bottomless ravine

runner