

Except from Chimimanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*? Some day at morning meeting?

Most of the people who attended her first diversity talk, at a small company in Ohio, wore sneakers. They were all white. Her presentation was titled "How to Talk About Race with Colleagues of Other Races," but who, she wondered, would they be talking to, since they were all white? Perhaps the janitor was black. "I'm no expert so don't quote me," she started, and they laughed, warm encouraging laughter, and she told herself that this would go well, she need not have worried about talking to a roomful of strangers in the middle of Ohio. (She had read, with mild worry, that openly sundown towns still existed here.) "The first step to honest communication about race is to realize that you cannot equate all racisms," she said, and then launched into her carefully prepared speech. When, at the end, she said, "Thank you," pleased with the fluidness of her delivery, the faces around her were frozen. The leaden clapping deflated her. Afterwards, she was left only with the director of human resources, drinking oversweet iced tea in the conference room, and talking about soccer, which he knew Nigeria played well, as though keen to discuss anything but the talk she had just given. That evening she received an e-mail: YOUR TALK WAS BALONEY. YOU ARE A RACIST. YOU SHOULD BE GRATEFUL WE LET YOU INTO THIS COUNTRY. That e-mail, written in all capital letters, was a revelation. The point of diversity workshops, or multicultural talks, was not to inspire any real change but to leave people feeling good about themselves. They did not want the content of her ideas; they merely wanted the gesture of her presence. They had not read her blog but they had heard that she was a "leading blogger" about race. And so, in the following weeks, as she gave more talks at companies and schools, she began to say what they wanted to hear, none of which she would ever write on her blog, because she knew that the people who read her blog were not the same people who attended her diversity workshops. During her talks, she said: "America has made great progress for which we should be very proud." In her blog she wrote: Racism should never have happened and so you don't get a cookie for reducing it. Still more invitations came. She hired a student intern, a Haitian American, her hair worn in elegant twists, who was nimble on the Internet, looking up whatever information Ifemelu needed, and deleting inappropriate comments almost as soon as they were posted. Ifemelu bought a small condominium. She had been startled, when she first saw the listing in the real estate section of the paper, to realize she could afford the down payment in cash. Signing her name above the word "homeowner" had left her with a frightening sense of being grown-up, and also with a small astonishment, that this was possible because of her blog. She converted one of the two bedrooms into a study and wrote there, standing often by the window to look down at her new Roland Park neighborhood, the restored row homes shielded by old trees. It surprised her, which blog posts got attention and which were hardly clicked on. Her post about trying to date online, "What's Love Got to Do with It?" continued to draw comments, like something sticky, after many months. So, still a bit sad about the breakup with The Hot White Ex, not into the bar scene, and so I signed up for online dating. And I looked at lots of profiles. So here's the thing. In that category where you choose the ethnicity you are interested in? White men tick white women, and the braver ones tick Asian and Hispanic. Hispanic men tick white and Hispanic. Black men are the only men likely to tick "all," but some don't even tick Black. They tick White, Asian, Hispanic. I wasn't feeling the love. But what's love got to do with all that ticking, anyway? You could walk into a grocery store and bump into someone and fall in love and that someone would not be the race you tick online. So after browsing, I cancelled my membership, thankfully still

on trial, got a refund, and will be walking around blindly in the grocery store instead. Comments came from people with similar stories and people saying she was wrong, from men asking her to put up a photo of herself, from black women sharing success stories of online dating, from people angry and from people thrilled. Some comments amused her, because they were wildly unconnected to the subject of the post. Oh fuck off, one wrote. Black people get everything easy. You can't get anything in this country unless you're black. Black women are even allowed to weigh more. Her recurring post "Mish Mash Friday," a jumble of thoughts, drew the most clicks and comments each week. Sometimes she wrote some posts expecting ugly responses, her stomach tight with dread and excitement, but they would draw only tepid comments. Now that she was asked to speak at roundtables and panels, on public radio and community radio, always identified simply as The Blogger, she felt subsumed by her blog. She had become her blog. There were times, lying awake at night, when her growing discomforts crawled out from the crevices, and the blog's many readers became, in her mind, a judgmental angry mob waiting for her, biding their time until they could attack her, unmask her.