

Jewel

Shopping at my hometown Jewel,
I'm white.

I don't know
what to do with my eyes. I tick

off my dad's list. Coffee filters,
strawberries, milk. I used to eat spaghetti

with my grandma
at The Windmill restaurant across the street.

I shopped this store
my whole white childhood, my whole
mashed potato childhood that had almost nothing

to do with race. Until it did. Until whites
started moving fast, fast, fast

and For Sale signs became illegal. But I wasn't paying
attention.

I was busy living my white life

and leaving.
Busy not thinking of the families
moving in, the families moving out, my parents

staying and staying
a lifetime on one street. Or was I unseeing

what I saw?

the ladies from church afraid to go to the mall?
the teacher who said my neighborhood was getting “dark”?
the girls mimicking big lips?
the neighbor telling my parents to sell and quick?
the cops circling and circling the White Castle parking lot?

I’ve been gone a long time.
There’s so few people here I know.

Except my parents. Who stayed
because of their stuff. Because

my mother could never give up
her brick ranch home.

It was here I first learned to whisper *black*.

When my parents spoke, if they spoke,
it was to note difference, to say

what a nice *black* cashier they had at the store,

at Jewel, where I grab a 2-liter of pop
under the aisles’ blinding florescence—

my big white silence stuck in my eye.