

Mourning Chicago

I left the radio on too long,
and so she hears the morning news,
my five-year-old licking peanut butter off toast,
stops, holds it in midair, and asks, *Cops shot two kids?*
Will they shoot me? And I know how to answer but I don't know

how to answer. I know
that because she is white and I am
white and her dad is white, even our Toyota
is white and our dog a beer-shine blonde, the cops
will not shoot her. And I am relieved and sickened by my relief,

and so I say, I left the radio
on too long, but that is wrong, and so
I say that cops are people who make mistakes,
but I know it's not just the cops, but us too who leave
the neighborhoods, the schools, the YMCAs, us too who leave

the cops alone
to tend to what everyone wants
to pretend doesn't exist, be it poverty, paranoia,
the pointlessness of trying to improve when—Her dad
interrupts, says cops help us. I shake my head, say we cannot

lie, although I lie
all the time, and he shakes
his head, suggesting she's young
enough for this lie, and I think how differently parents
across our Untied States hold these conversation in the kitchen

everyone chewing on a different
snap, crackle, and pop as they discuss what
to do when approached by a cop. And it's not just
because we're white, but also that we have enough money
to keep the tags up, the brake lights on, the accent with no "from."

My mom taught me
to say, Sorry Officer, I'm just
running late to Grandma's house, as if life
is a woodsy trek sometimes interrupted by a furry
wolf whose teeth can be appeased by a smile and a please.

I remove the fairytale
for my daughter, say they are
another "dispenser of violence in this world,"
and my husband says, Stop this, and I say, I will when
it stops, and he says it will never stop, and so we fumble for the volume

as the radio mumbles,
our daughter now equally confused
by the two: why they killed kids and why they
will not kill her, so she asks again, *Why won't they shoot me?*
as the radio keeps up its monotone morning prattle to go down
with the coffee and cream, its morning reporting, its *Chicago, Chicago, Chicago.*

*Quote in the penultimate stanza is from Ta-Nehisi Coates *Between the World and Me*

