

## A story about the Letter J

*I had to stop here and there in order by resting to allow  
my Jewishness to collect itself.*

■ Franz Kafka *Diaries*, November 1, 1911

A “J” spray-painted on my olive green house in South Philly,  
its white-hooked tail grazes my daughters head.

A skin-head, says my neighbor Jorge,  
un racist blanco, , no entiendo,

holding my hand inside his hand  
far longer than any gringo would.

He smells of saw-dust and cologne.  
I shoot a picture with my phone

of my daughter underneath the “J.”  
Evidence is always good to gather.

She traces the letter with her small finger.  
She’s just learning about how letters

make words, and words make sentences.  
Doesn’t yet know sentences can kill:

*Arbeit macht frei.* Sentences can lie:  
*Make America Great Again.* Sentences

can heal: *I have a dream.* She’s fished  
a pen from my bag and draws a K beside the J.

A new story begins. Across the street  
Mozart seeps out of the second story,

twelve year old Anita from China.  
Jorge and I look up, as if music were something

to be seen, as though it were something we could hold onto.  
I’ll paint for you, he says solemnly.

*It will be  
like new, like it never happened.*