

## **What Everybody Knows Now - by Jacqueline Woodson**

Even though the laws have changed  
my grandmother still takes us  
to the back of the bus when we go downtown  
in the rain. It's easier, my grandmother says,  
than having white folks look at me like I'm dirt.

But we aren't dirt. We are people  
paying the same fare as other people.  
When I say this to my grandmother,  
she nods, says, Easier to stay where you belong.

I look around and see the ones  
who walk straight to the back. See  
the ones who take a seat up front, daring  
anyone to make them move. And know  
this is who I want to be. Not scared  
like that. Brave  
like that.

Still, my grandmother takes my hand downtown  
pulls me right past the restaurants that have to let us sit  
wherever we want now. No need in making trouble,  
she says. You all go back to New York City but  
I have to live here.

We walk straight past Woolworth's  
without even looking in the windows  
because the one time my grandmother went inside  
they made her wait and wait. Acted like  
I wasn't even there. It's hard not to see the moment—

my grandmother in her Sunday clothes, a hat  
with a flower pinned to it  
neatly on her head, her patent-leather purse,  
perfectly clasped  
between her gloved hands—waiting quietly

long past her turn.