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Check Out, Jewel

Kathleen Keenan
College of DuPage

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CHECK-OUT, JEWEL

Kathleen Keenan

You arranged cans with cans,
meat wrapped, bread on top,
so precisely perfect that when I picked up the bag,
I picked up you,
your way of rearranging yourself if you could,
your less than perfect look,
stared at in aisles, over carts.

You work day after day at Jewel, caring for those cans,
ordering each item into its right place,
looking downward into those bags
as though you could take your face and tuck it under your chin
where at least it would be safe
from stares.

I wonder where
what happened to you came from,
what biblical, quixotic, beautiful lie
Christians wove to explain that face, those bones.

I thought/think of
you for hours and
couldn't
get you written
nowhere
no way —
Until I
choked with nothing
coming out;
picked up this bag
and, on it,
wrote.